

Running Records

Classroom teachers can use running records for instructional purposes to guide them in their decisions about any of the following:

- the evaluation of text difficulty
- the grouping of children
- the acceleration, of a child
- monitoring progress of children
- allowing different children to move through different books at different speeds while keeping track of (and records of) individual progress
- observing particular difficulties in particular children.

For critical decisions such as those made in a survey to find the children having most difficulty, to provide special and supplementary assistance, to make decisions about promotion, or to inform a psychologist of the child's progress it would be wise to obtain running records on materials from at least three levels of difficulty:

- an easy text (95 to 100 percent correct)
- an instructional text (90 to 94 percent correct)
- a hard text (80 to 89 percent correct).

This assumes that there is some gradient of difficulty in the texts used for reading in the school's programme, even if the children are learning to read from storybooks. The current book (or a selection from that book) will usually provide the instructional level. These three samples on three levels of difficulty provide valuable insights into

- how the reader orchestrates effective reading (on the easier materials)
- how processing and problem-solving can be done (on instructional texts)
- and how and when effective processing breaks down (on the more difficult materials).

The classroom teacher will probably choose text materials that are part of her everyday program. A visitor to the school (such as a reading adviser, a speech therapist or a school psychologist) should ask the class teacher for the book the child is working on at present, and for her suggestions about texts that are just a little harder or easier in her program. However, if there are reasons why such judgments are not easily made, for example because the class does not use any recognizably graded sets of materials, or a teacher new to this class level has no sense of a gradient of difficulty in the stories being read, then the teacher or observer may wish to use a standard set of graded paragraphs. From these the observer can select paragraphs that provide evidence of reading skills on three levels of difficulty that reveal strengths, processing and difficulties. To take good records of reading behavior teachers must be well trained. Six teachers taking and scoring the same record should get the same results. One teacher reading another teacher's record should be able to replay what a child actually said and did.

How To Do It

Some Conventions Used For Recording

1. Mark every word read correctly with a tick (or check). A record of the first five pages of the 'Ready to Read' (1963) book *Early in the Morning* that was 100 percent correct would look like this. (The lines indicate page breaks.)

Bill is asleep.	✓	✓	✓
'Wake up, Bill,'	✓	✓	✓
said Peter.	✓	✓	
Sally is asleep.	✓	✓	✓
'Wake up, Sally,'	✓	✓	✓
said Mother.	✓	✓	
Father is shaving.	✓	✓	✓

2. Record a wrong response with the text under it.

Child: home
Text: house [One error]

3. If a child tries several times to read a word, record all his trials.

Child: here | h— | home
Text: house | | [One error]

Child: h— | ho— | home
Text: home | | [No error]

4. If a child succeeds in correcting a previous error this is recorded as 'self-correction' (written SC). Note that example 3 did not result in a self-correction.

Child: where | when | SC
Text: were | | [No error]

5. If no response is given to a word it is recorded with a dash. Insertion of a word is recorded over a dash.

No response	Insertion
Child: —	Child: <u>here</u>
Text: house	Text: — [In each case one error]

6. If the child balks, unable to proceed because he is aware he has made an error and cannot correct it, or because he cannot attempt the next word, he is told the word (written T).

<i>Child:</i>	<i>home</i>	
Text:	house	T

[One error]

7. An appeal for help (A) from the child is turned back to the child for further effort before using T as in 6 above. Say 'You try it'.

<i>Child:</i>	—	A	<i>here</i>
Text:	house	—	T

[One error]

8. Sometimes the child gets into a state of confusion and it is necessary to extricate him. The most detached method of doing this is to say 'Try that again', marking TTA on the record. This would not involve any teaching, but the teacher may indicate where the child should begin again. It is a good idea to put square brackets around the first set of muddled behaviour, enter the TTA, remember to count that as one error only, and then begin a fresh record of the problem text. An example of this recording would be:

✓	look	said	✓	✓
Susan	went	with	the	headmaster
Timothy	TTA			
to				

✓	said	R	SC	✓	✓	✓
	went					
✓						

[One error]

9. Repetition (R) is not counted as error behaviour. Sometimes it is used to confirm a previous attempt. Often it results in self-correction. It is useful to record it as it often indicates how much sorting out the child is doing. 'R', standing for repetition, is used to indicate repetition of a word, with R2 or R3 indicating the number of repetitions. If the child goes back over a group of words, or returns to the beginning of the line or sentence in his repetition, the point to which he returns is shown by an arrow.

<i>Child:</i>	<i>Here is the home</i>	R	SC
Text:	Here is the house		


[No error]

10. Sometimes the child re-reads the text (repetition) and corrects some but not all errors. The following example shows the recording of this behaviour.

<i>Child:</i>	<i>a</i>	SC	<i>house</i>	R	[One error] [One SC]
<i>Text:</i>	the		home		

11. Directional attack on the printed text is recorded by telling the child to 'Read it with your finger'.

Left to right	L	→	R
Right to left	L	←	R
Snaking		↺↻	
Bottom to top	B	→	T

12. Pausing can be recorded by a 

13. If the child produces sounds as when sounding out, record the sounds made with lower case letters separated with dashes.

c-a-t

14. If the child says letter names, record them with capital letters separated with dashes.

C-A-T

Analyzing The Reading Record

From the running record of reading behavior containing all the child's behavior on his current book, consider what is happening as the child reads.

Some Conventions For Scoring The Records

In counting the number of errors, some arbitrary decisions must be made but the following have been found workable.

1. Credit the child with any correct or corrected words.

<i>Child:</i>	<i>to</i>	<i>the</i>	<i>shops</i>	[Two errors]
<i>Text:</i>	for	the	bread	
<i>Score:</i>	×	✓	×	

2. There is no penalty for trials that are eventually correct.

A.

<i>Child:</i>	<i>want</i>	<i>won't</i>	<i>went</i>	<i>SC</i>
<i>Text:</i>	went			
<i>Score:</i>	—	—	✓	

[No error]
[One SC]

B.

<i>Child:</i>	<i>where</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>when</i>	<i>were</i>	<i>SC</i>
<i>Text:</i>	were				
<i>Score:</i>	—	—	—	✓	

[No error]
[One SC]

3. **Insertions** add errors so that a child can have more errors than there are words in a line.

Child:	<u>The train went toot, toot, toot</u>					
Text:	The	little	engine	sighed		
Score:	✓	×	×	×	×	×
					[Five errors]	

4. The child cannot receive a minus score for a page. The lowest page score is 0.
5. **Omissions** If a line or sentence is omitted each word is counted as an error. If pages are omitted (perhaps because two pages were turned together) they are not counted as errors. Note that in this case, the number of words on the omitted pages must be deducted from the Running Words Total before calculation.
6. **Repeated Errors** If the child makes an error (e.g. 'run' for 'ran') and then substitutes this word repeatedly, it counts as an error every time; but substitution of a proper name (e.g., 'Mary' for 'Molly') is counted only the first time.
7. **Multiple Errors And Self-Corrections** If a child makes two or more errors (e.g., reads a phrase wrongly) each word is an error. If he then corrects all these errors each corrected word is a self-correction.
8. **Broken words** Where a word is pronounced as two words (e.g., a/way) even when this is backed up by pointing as if it were two words, this is regarded as an error of pronunciation, not as a reading error unless what is said is matched to a different word. Such things as 'pitcher' for 'picture' and 'gonna' for 'going to' are counted as correct.
9. **Inventions** defeat the system. When the young child is creatively producing his own version of the story the scoring system finally breaks down and the judgment 'inventing' is recorded for that page, story or book.
10. **'Try that again'** When the child is in a tangle this instruction, which does not involve teaching, can be given. It counts as one error and only the second attempt is scored.

11. **Fewest Errors** If there are alternate ways of scoring responses a general principle is to choose the method that gives the fewest possible errors as in B below.

A.	<i>Child:</i>	<u>We went for the bread</u>
	Text:	You went to the shop for the bread
	Score:	× √ × √ × × × ×
		[Six errors]
B.	<i>Child:</i>	<u>We went</u> <u>for the bread</u>
	Text:	You went to the shop for the bread
	Score:	× √ × × × √ √ √
		[Four errors]

Calculate The Error Rate

Compare the number of errors with the number of running words. Does the child read his book with one error in every five running words of text (which is not good) or is it more like one error in 20 running words (which is good)? Record results on the Running Record Sheet.

Calculate the percentage of errors (see Conversion Table). If there is more than 10 percent of error in the record rate this is a 'hard' text for this child. (For the average child there is movement from 90 percent accuracy when he is first promoted to a book to 95 percent or more as he completes his learning on that book.)

When children read a book with less than 90 percent accuracy it is difficult for them to judge for themselves whether their attempts at a word are good ones or poor ones. They need easier material that they can attempt at a rate of not more than one error in 10 words at the time they begin the new book. The reading text should use language that they can easily anticipate. In the very earliest stages it is sometimes necessary to repeat the text until children have almost memorized it, but not quite. Then it will come readily to the tip of the tongue. It is as if the words the child needs are stored in the depths of memory and have to be assisted to float to the surface. The child's own dictated stories provide good reading texts for young children for just this reason -- the words and construction of the text should be readily recalled.

If the text is in a different style from that which the child usually reads, his error rate may increase because he is predicting from the baseline of old expectations that are inappropriate for the present text.

Error Behaviors: What Can We Learn From This?

To read a continuous text the child must use a variety of skills held in delicate balance. Specific weaknesses or strengths can upset that balance. There are some questions about the errors for a particular child that can guide the teacher's analysis of the behavior record. At this point attend only to the errors (and not the self-corrections).

Oral Language Skills

Are these good enough to make the reading of this text possible? (For instance, could the child repeat the sentences of the text if you asked him to, one by one?) Or, is his language so fluent that the coordination of visual perception and motor movement with language is difficult?

Speed Of Responding

The rate at which a child reads and the time spent on pausing and processing cues are in the young child poor indicators of progress. One child may read with the fluency of oral language but may be a poorer reader than another child who pauses and engages in much self-correction behavior. At this particular stage in reading progress it is good for the child making average progress to be concerned about error and try to rectify error if possible. It is poor to maintain fluency and not to notice that one has made errors.

Fast responding can be an indication that language is dominating the reading process allowing for little visual search to take place.

What Kinds Of Information Does The Child Use?

To work out whether the child is responding to the different sources of information in print (and the different kinds of cues that could be used) you need to look at every error that the child makes and ask yourself 'Now what led the child to do (or say) that? Try to work out whether the child was using information from:

- the meaning of the message
- the structure of the sentence
- something from the visual cues.

Firstly, consider only the behavior up to the error.

- Meaning. Does the child use meaning (M)? If what he reads makes sense, even though it is inaccurate, then he is probably applying his knowledge of the world to his reading.
- Structure. Is what he said possible in an English sentence (S for syntactically appropriate)? If it is, his oral language is probably influencing his responding. If it is not, there may be two reasons. Perhaps his language skill is limited and his personal 'grammar' does not contain the structures used in his reading book. Or, if he is paying close attention to detail, or to word-by-word reading, he may not be allowing his control over English syntax to influence his choices.
- Visual information. Does he use visual information (V) from the letters and words or the layout of print? *
- Word memory. Does he read word by word as if recalling each word from a memory bank, unrelated to what has gone before? He may not realise that reading is like speaking, and that his language behavior is a rich source of help in choosing correct reading responses.

*Whether the child is relating visual information to sounds (phonological information) or to orthography (information about spelling) is a refinement of using visual information not distinguished in this analysis at this time.

It is misleading if the teacher looks for error behavior selectively; one should analyse every error and count those that show attention to this or that kind of cue. We want to be able to conclude, on good evidence, that 'He pays more attention to visual cues than to meaning', or 'He is guided by structure and meaning but does not search for visual cues'. It is only when you go to the trouble of analyzing all the errors that you get quality information about the way the reader is working on print.

When teachers are familiar with taking running records they may want to include error analysis on the record form. They can write M for meaning, S for structure and V for visual cues on the form and record, by circling which cues the child was using. Notice that what you are recording in this case is your best guess: you cannot know what cues the child used. A record may show one, two or three types of cues used on any one error. If you write M S V alongside each error and circle the cues you think the child used, the uncircled letters will then show the cues neglected.

You have considered the errors first, and you know what cues up to that error the child was using.

Enter comments on the Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections (Running Record Sheet).

Cross-Checking Strategies

Now consider whether the child can check one kind of information with another.

Cross-checking is a tentative behaviour. It is not possible to be specific about it. One has a hunch that it is happening after observing the child. We must ask 'Is this child checking one kind of information against another?'

Cross-checking is most obvious when a child is not satisfied with a response for some reason. The child may make another attempt, look back, think again, or complain that a necessary letter is missing. Usually two sources of information are involved and one is checked against the other.

The child checks on the word that he read using one kind of information, by looking at a different kind of information. He uses meaning but complains that some letters are not there. He uses visual cues from letters but says that it doesn't make sense.

Some examples of this kind of behavior are these.

- He can get both movement and language occurring together in a coordinated way, and knows when he has run out of words.
- He checks language prediction by looking at some letters.
- He can hear the sounds in a word he speaks and checks whether the expected letters are there.
- After a wrong response a child can make another attempt at the word (searching).
- After a wrong response the child repeats the sentence, phrase or word, indicating he is aware and trying to get some additional information (repeating).
- After a wrong response the child makes a verbal comment about it, for example, 'No! That's not right!' (commenting on the mismatch).

It is useful to try to specify which two kinds of information the child is comparing. Usually cross-checking is reserved for describing early behaviors that suggest the child knows there are different kinds of information in print and that one kind can be compared with another kind and one expects all kinds to agree on the solution. Most of this behavior becomes superseded by more deliberate and successful attempts to self-correct using multiple sources of information.

A child with outstanding memory for what he hears or with very fast language production often has difficulty in slowing up enough to enable him to learn the visual discriminations. Yet good readers search for cues from different sources that confirm a response.

Self-Correction

Now look at any self-correction behavior in the running record. This occurs when the child discovers information in the text that tells him something is wrong. He is aware that a particular message is to be communicated and tries to discover this by using cues. Efficient self-correction behavior is an important skill in good reading. Calculate the self-correction rate (see chart). Even if the self-correction rate is low the prognosis is good, because self-correction does exist!

When analyzing self-corrections for the information they can give about the child's processing of print, consider the error first. What kind of information was the child using up to the time when the error occurred? Think only of the information in the error substitution. Then, in a two-step process, consider what extra information the child used to get the self-correction. What extra information is in the self-correction that was not in the error? Enter on the Running Record Sheet in the second of the analysis columns headed SC (self-correction) all the sources of information probably being used in the self-correction. Write MSV alongside each self-correction and circle the cues you think the child used. Are cross-checking strategies evident in the self-correction analysis?

If self-correction is evident but inefficient it is still a good prognosis. Its absence in a record which contains errors is a danger sign. A child who is making errors and is not aware of this, or who makes no attempt to correct himself, is in difficulty. He is not aware of the need to read a precise message or he is not aware of the existence of cues, or he does not know how to use them, or he does not try to solve the problem. Self-correction rates vary greatly. This is because they are not absolute scores: they are always relative measures. They vary with text difficulty, with error rate, with accuracy, and with effort. They cannot be understood unless they are interpreted together with text difficulty and accuracy scores.